

# The Light Shines Through

A story of service, dedication, and the power of a positive mindset.

by Jeff Thaxton

Prime Fit Instructor at Fairwinds-Spokane

At Leisure Care, our employees have a very special role in the lives of our residents. Not only do we serve the seniors in our care, we aim to make each day in our communities just a little better than the last. This kind of quiet commitment to our LC family fosters relationships where we can truly get to know our residents on a personal level. We love sharing stories like this one that highlight the wonderful people in our LC family, both our staff and our residents.

*“Ted tells me every day how much he loves it here, how he looked all over and would never live anywhere but here.”*





Ted Siekerman, second from right, was recognized for his 31 years of volunteer service at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane in 2015. When he completed his last day of service there, he had accumulated 45,000 volunteer hours – equivalent to nearly 22 years of full-time work.



Fairwinds-Spokane resident Ted Siekerman, left, carries a positive outlook wherever he goes, including to his three-times-a-week Prime Fit sessions with instructor Jeff Thaxton (right.)

“Have a good day Ted,” I sometimes say to Ted Siekerman, a quiet, cheerful resident at Fairwinds – Spokane in Washington State after our morning exercise classes.

“They’re all good days,” is his typical response.

I had the pleasure of meeting Ted in August 2015 when he first moved to Fairwinds – Spokane. He seems to carry his positive outlook with him wherever he goes. Perhaps part of the reason is how grateful he is for life. On November 6, 1950, while United States Marine Corporal Ted Siekerman was serving our country during the Korean War, he passed out after sustaining mortar shrapnel throughout his body. He woke up once on a Jeep ambulance and then a second time in a Korean hospital. The doctor

attending to him said that he would never use his left arm again and would not work another day in his life. Imagine receiving this devastating news at 20 years old!

Instead of giving up, he refused to accept the doctor’s prognosis. Grabbing a small rubber ball he started squeezing it repeatedly to rebuild his arm strength. Through this, and range-of-motion exercises, he regained full use of his arm without anyone’s assistance. He remains grateful to the Marines, whom he served with for just over four years.

“They got me out and saved my life,” he says.

After the war Ted went to work for the Spokane Railroad, serving for 44 years as a crane operator, taking locomotives apart and putting them back to-

gether. During this time he also met Lee, his wife of 50 years, and they had five children together.

A positive upbringing from dedicated parents also played an enormous part in shaping Ted’s character. Ralph Siekerman, who also worked for the railroad, and Gertrude, Ralph’s wife of 48 years, taught Ted the value of hard work.

“They taught me to do the best you can when working on something,” says Ted. “They taught me to work together and respect my elders. They were hard workers.” Ted remembers buying his mom her first electric stove, as well as her first washer and dryer set.

About 10 years before his retirement in December 1985, Ted’s wife, Lee, convinced him to volunteer at the Spokane Vet-

erans Hospital on Fridays. One of Ted’s main duties was escorting patients into the ER, to X-rays, CAT scans, or wherever else they needed to go. This was the start of a long service there, which he continued after retiring and until he moved to Fairwinds – Spokane.

He would take 100 calls in an eight-hour shift on a normal day, and by 2015 he had accumulated an astounding 45,000 volunteer hours! His wife, Lee, also amassed an amazing amount of volunteer hours in the pharmacy and front office of the VA, about 30,600 hours to be specific. She volunteered until September 30, 2004, one day before her passing.

One example of Ted’s continued hard work and dedication lies in the strength gains he has made during his Prime

Fit Strength and Conditioning class. When he started the class just over two years ago he would use five pounds of resistance on the upper back machine and perform about 15 to 20 repetitions. He also did the leg press machine 15 to 20 times with 65 pounds of resistance.

He never missed his three-times-weekly class, and through slow and steady weight increases on the exercises, he now performs 30 repetitions on the back machine with 36 pounds of resistance and presses 210 pounds on the leg press 30 times. He also does a variety of other strength, cardio and balance exercises.

He believes exercising and maintaining a busy schedule at Fairwinds – Spokane are what help keep him going.

“Ted tells me every day how much he loves it here, how he looked all over and would never live anywhere but here,” says Kim Madore, the Fairwinds – Spokane Activities Coordinator, noting that Ted never misses a single outing.

His spirit of giving back to his community has continued since he took residency in Fairwinds. He routinely goes back to the VA to donate blood, and he can often be seen in our hallways escorting a fellow resident in a wheelchair, just as he did for so many years as a hospital volunteer.

I believe God has shined one of the biggest lights I have ever seen through Ted Siekerman and into the lives of countless others. He has certainly inspired me and the rest of the family here. Thank you, Ted! ♦